



**Black Sea Cultural Animation Program**  
Pilot model for mobilizing the common cultural characteristics for creative destination management in the Black Sea Basin **(BS CAP)**

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## **Armenia: Black Sea Cultural Heritage**

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## The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin

### Armavir region, Vagharshapat

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The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin (301-303)

The Armenian Apostolic Church is the world's oldest National Church, is part of Oriental Orthodoxy, and is one of the most ancient Christian communities. Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official religion in 301 AD, in establishing this church. The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church traces its origins to the missions of Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus in the 1st century. The official name of the Church is the One Holy Universal Apostolic Orthodox Armenian Church. It is sometimes referred to as the Gregorian Church, but the latter name is not preferred by the Church, as it views the Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus as the founders, and St. Gregory the Illuminator as merely the first official governor of the Church.

Since the adoption of Christianity the construction of churches, monasteries and Christian monuments has started. A lot of churches and chapels are spread all over Armenia. In every village and every town you will always find church or other religious place.

The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin is the spiritual and administrative headquarters of the worldwide Armenian Church, the center of the faith of the Armenian nation - the Mother Cathedral of the Armenian Church. The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin is a blend of the past, present and future of the worldwide Armenian Church. Preserving the past are the numerous museums, libraries and the Mother Cathedral itself, all holding a vast richness of history and treasures. The Mother See is responsible for the preservation of artifacts, both those created by the Church and those given to the church as gifts over time. Carrying on the work of the present and future are the innumerable departments and programs of the Armenian Church. The Mother Cathedral, founded by the Descent of Christ, has stood as a symbol against time of the Armenian faith, nation and people. The Cathedral is the most recognized landmark of the Armenian Church. Built and consecrated by St. Gregory the Illuminator and king Trdat in AD 303, the Cathedral is located in the city of Vagharshapat, Armenia. St. Gregory chose the location of the Cathedral in accordance with a vision that he had. In his dream he saw "Miatsin", the Only Begotten Son of God, with glittering light on his face descending

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from the Heavens and with a golden hammer striking the ground where the Cathedral was to be located. Hence comes the name "Echmiadzin", which translates literally to "the place" where the Only-Begotten Son of God descended. Apart from the Mother Cathedral, Vagharshapat contains other important Armenian churches and cathedrals.

The Cathedral of Echmiadzin, the Churches of Saint Hripsime, Saint Gayane and Saint Shoghakat, and the Archaeological Site of Zvartnots are listed among the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

## Zvartnots Temple

### Armavir



Zvartnots, a complex of structures erected in the middle of the 7th century (Armavir district), is of extreme architectural value.

The complex consisted of St. George temple or Zvartnots («vigil forces», «celestial angels») and the palace of Catholicos Nerses III, known as «Builder».

Zvartnots, built as Armenia's main cathedral in 641-661, was to suppress Echmiadzin cathedral by its grandeur. This purpose was served by the original architectural composition of the building which is an example of a central-dome temple different in its appearance from the antique and Byzantine structures of this kind. The plan of Zvartnots is based on the composition of the central nucleus of Armenia's cross-winged, dome-type structures of the previous times, that is the Greek cross. However, this cross is harmoniously fitted into a circle rather than into a square. Zvartnots' architecture was supposed to impress the onlooker by its extraordinary artistic splendor.

According to Stepanos Taronatsi, an Armenian historian of the late 10th and the early 11th centuries (Stepanos of Taron, known as Asoghik) Zvartnots lay in ruins as early as in the tenth century. The remnants of Zvartnots, even in ruins, are a majestic sight. There survived only the lower parts of the walls and individual fragments.

According to this reconstruction, the building consisted of three polyhedrons the lower one being 32-hedral and the upper one 16-hedral and crowned with a cone-shaped cupola. The central part of the interior had the shape of a tetraconch in the plan. The decoration of Zvartnots temple followed the principle, common in the Armenian architecture of the 5th-7th centuries, of bringing out the basic architectural details. The outer surfaces of the polyhedrons,

especially of the lower one, were ornamented with a rich arcature.

Presumably, the architect of Zvartnots knew the Syrian and Byzantine architectural structures of the same kind. Zvartnots stands out for an unusual composition which differed from that of these structures. Syria and Byzantium had no structures of this type. This is confirmed by Movses Kalankatvatsi, a 10th century Armenian historian, who wrote about the intention of Emperor Constantine of Byzantium, who had been present at the consecration of Zvartnots when it was nearing completion in 652, to build a similar structure in his own capital. This intention failed to materialize due to the architect's death on his way to Constantinople.

Zvartnots is a monument which embodies the centuries old traditions of Armenian architects. In its artistic image and daring spatial arrangement, formed by an intricate combination of arches and buttresses, Zvartnots is an outstanding monument of world architecture, an evidence of the high level of the development of the artistic and engineering thought in the 7th-century Armenia. Its architectural idea later became widely spread and developed in new shapes and new artistic compositions.

To the south-west of the temple there was the Catholicos' palace which has also come down to us in ruins. It was a complex of capitolly-built and regularly laid-out presence-chambers, dwelling, auxiliary and service premises. The scale, as well as the architectural and artistic features of the

palace was coordinated with those of the temple.

## Geghard monastery

### Kotayk



To north-east of Garni, higher up the gorge of the Azat River, there is a magnificent monument of medieval Armenian architecture - Geghard monastery. The specific character of this monument reflects, no doubt, the peculiarities of the austere and majestic scenery around it. The picturesque gorge of Gegharda-dzor with its high and precipitous cliffs is extremely winding, and the monastery opens to view unexpectedly behind a turn of a steep path leading to it. In the 1950s a road sign was put up near this turn - a lioness on a high pedestal, with its head turned as if showing the way. Its figure is stylistically connected with the decoration of the monastery.

The exact date of Geghard's foundation is unknown. In one of the caves of Gegharda-

dzor there still gushes a spring which was believed to be a sacred one in heathen times. Following a tradition, it continued to be worshipped even after Christianity had spread in Armenia. As a result, a monastery called Ayrivank, or a «cave monastery», was founded there at the beginning of the fourth century. The present name can be traced back to the 13th century when, as a legend says, the legendary spear - geghard - (that pierced Christ) was brought there.

Nothing has remained of the structures of Ayrivank. According to Armenian historians of the 4th, 8th and 10th centuries the monastery comprised, apart from religious buildings, well-appointed residential and service installations. Ayrivank suffered greatly in 923 from Nasr, a vice-regent of an Arabian caliph in Armenia, who plundered its valuable property, including unique manuscripts, and burned down the magnificent structures of the monastery. Earthquakes also did it no small damage.

The existing ensemble dates back to the 12th-13th centuries, the time of the flourishing of national culture, especially architecture. Under the princes of Zakharia and Ivane the chapel of Grigory the Enlightener - the most ancient structure of the monastery - its main temple and its vestibule, as well as the first cave church was built. In the second half of the 13th century the monastery was bought by princes Proshyan. Over a short period they built the cave structures which brought Geghard well-merited fame - the second cave church, the family sepulcher of zhamatun Papak and

Ruzukan, a hall for gatherings and studies (collapsed in the middle of the 20th century) and numerous cells. In one of the cave cells there lived, in the 13th century, Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi, the well-known Armenian historian. The one- and two-storey residential and service structures, situated on the perimeter of the monastery's yard, were repeatedly reconstructed.

The chapel of Gregory the Enlightener, built before 1177, stands high above the road, a hundred meters away from the entrance to the monastery. It is partly hewed in massive solid rock; its composition was, in all probability, largely influenced by the shape of the cave which existed there. Traces of plaster with remnants of dark frescoes show that there were murals inside the chapel. Khachkars with various ornaments, inserted into the exterior walls and hewn on the adjacent rock surfaces, enliven the outward appearance of the chapel.

The main monuments of Geghard take up the middle of the monastery yard surrounded with walls and towers on three sides and blocked by a steep cliff on the fourth one. This gives the ensemble a unique appearance.

## Heathen temple of Garni

### Kotayq

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The fortress of Garni is situated in the village of the same name in the Kotayk District. That was a mighty fortress well known from chronicles (Cornelius Tacitus, Movses Khorenatsi, etc.). The structures of Garni combine elements of Hellenistic and national culture, which is an evidence of antique influences and the distinctive building traditions of the Armenian people. Artistic merits and uniqueness of its monuments place Garni among outstanding creations of architecture of world importance. The structures of the fortress of Garni are in perfect harmony with the surrounding nature. The fortress is situated in a picturesque mountain locality and commands a broad panorama of orchards, fields and mountain slopes covered with motley carpets of varicoloured grasses, of the jagged and precipitous canyon of the Azat River. Strategically, the place for building this fortress was very cleverly chosen. In very ancient times (the third

millennium BC.) a cyclopic fortress existed there. According to a cuneiform record found on the territory of Garni, the fortress was conquered by Argishti I, the king of Urartu, in the first half of the 8th century B.C. In the epoch of the Armenian rulers of the Ervandids, Artashesids and Arshakids dynasties (since the third century B.C. to the fourth century AD). Garni was a summer residence of the kings and the place where their troops were stationed.

The fortress of Garni stands on a triangular cape which dominates the locality and juts into the river. A deep gorge and steep mountain slopes serve as a natural impregnable obstacle, and therefore the fortress wall was put up only on the side of the plain. It was put together of large square-shaped slabs of basalt placed flat on top of each other without mortar and fastened together with iron cramps sealed with lead. The evenly spaced rectangular towers and the concave shape of the middle of the most vulnerable northern wall, which increased the effectiveness of flank shooting, added much to the defense capacity of the fortress and, at the same time, enhanced its artistic merits. The palace complex included several disconnected buildings: a temple, a presence chamber, a columned tall, a residential block, a bath-house, etc. They were situated around the vast main square of the fortress, in its southern part, away from the entranceway, where they formed an ensemble. In the northern part there probably were the premises of the service

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staff, the king's guards and the garrison. The cape top was crowned with a temple which overlooked the square by its main northern facade. The temple, the artistic center of the complex, is on the central axis passing through the fortress' gate. The temple was built in the second half of the first century B.C. and dedicated to a heathen god, probably to Mitra, the god of the sun, whose figure stood in the depth of the sanctuary. After Christianity had been proclaimed the state religion in Armenia in 301, the temple was probably used as a summer residence of the kings. A chronicle describes it as "a house of coolness". In its style, the temple, a six-column periptere, resembles similar structures in Asia Minor (Thermes, Sagala, Pergam), Syria (Baalbek) and Rome. Its architectural shapes are basically-Hellenistic but local traditions also show in it.

### Tatev monastery

### Syunik



Tatev monastery is situated near the village of the same name in part of Zangezur - ancient Syunik (now Syunik district). The

monastery was founded in the ninth century in place of a tabernacle well-known in ancient times. The strategically advantageous location on a cape formed by a deep river gorge with precipitous rocky slopes favored the construction of a mighty defense complex there. At one time Tatev was the political center of Syunik principality. In the 10th century it had a population of 1000 and controlled numerous villages. In the 13th century it owned 680 villages.

The main church of Poghos and Petros (Peter and Paul) built in 895-906. The outward appearance of the temple is severe and laconic. Its harmonious proportions add to the impression of its considerable height.

Special attention was paid to the interior decoration of the church which was the main cathedral of Syunik principality. In 930 the walls of the church were decorated with frescoes, now almost totally lost. In the main apse there was a representation of Christ sitting on a throne and surrounded with three prophets and four saints. The western wall was taken up by an enormous fresco showing the Doomsday, and northern wall, be scenes of Nativity.

Grigory Church adjoins the main church on the southern side. According to chronicle, the church was built in 1295 in the place of an earlier building of 836-848.

The monument "Gavazan", erected in 904 in the yard, near the dwelling premises of the monastery, is a unique work of Armenian architectural and engineering art. This is an octahedral pillar, built of small stones; eight meters tall, it is crowned with an ornamented cornice, with an open-work khachkar towering on it. As a result of seismic tremors, and even at a mere touch



of human hand, the pillar, hinge-coupled to a stylobate, tilts and then returns to the initial position.

The square-shaped church of St.Astvatatzin (Holy Virgin), dating back to the 11th century, is of a type rare in Armenian architecture.

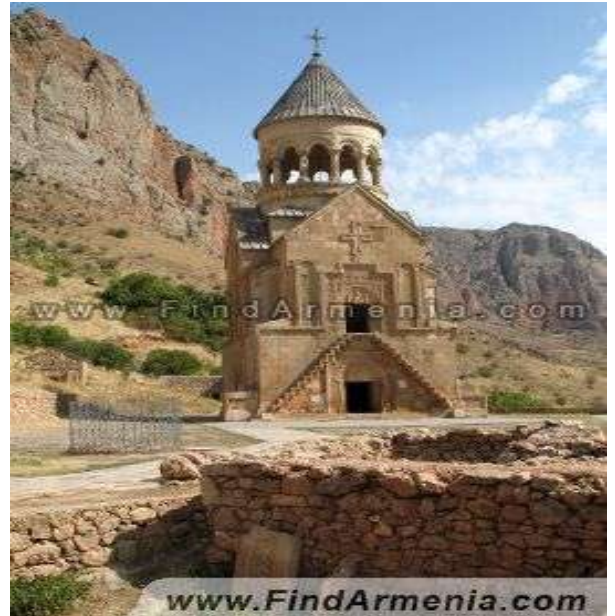
The chambers of the Father Superior, the refectory with a kitchen and storerooms, the dwelling and service premises form an almost complete circle around these structures. They were capitally rebuilt in the 17th-18th centuries. There were many secret depositories in solid rock.

Tatev ensemble fits in perfectly with the mountainous landscape around it. A large church, dominating the surrounding structures and visible from afar, is the architectural and artistic center of the ensemble. The residential and service premises, arranged in a single row on the perimeter, set off the polyhedral rock foundation and seem to be an extension of it. This gives the ensemble an original and majestic appearance.

The world's longest 5.7-kilometer ropeway called "Wings of Tatev" opened in Armenia on October 16. The cable car covers the distance between the villages Halidzor and Tatev that is about 5.7 km in 12 minutes and can carry 25 passengers at a time. The ropeway was also included in the Guinness Book of Records. The construction of "Wings of Tatev" lasted 11 months. The project was implemented by National Competitiveness Fund of Armenia.

## Noravank monastery complex

### Vayots Dzor



The Noravank monastery is situated on a ledge of a deep winding gorge of a tributary of the Arpa River near the village of Amaghu, Vayots Dzor district. Noravank ensemble stands amidst the bizarre-shaped precipitous red cliffs. Built in place of an ancient monastery, it grew in the reign of Princes Orbelyan of Syunik. In the 13th-14th centuries the monastery became a residence of Syunik's bishops and, consequently, a major religious and, later, cultural center of Armenia. Of great interest are the vestibule of St.Karapet church and the church of St.Astvatatzin, built by Momik. The church of St.Karapet (the 9th-10th cc.), which has come down to us in ruins, is the most ancient monument of Noravank. To the north of it, there is the main temple, also

dedicated to St.Karapet. Erected in 1216-1223, it belongs to the widespread cross-winged domed type with two-storey side-chapels in the corners.

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The vestibule, erected in 1261, was probably a four-pillar one. In 1321 the building, probably destroyed by an earthquake, was covered with a new roof in the shape of an enormous stone tent with horizontal divisions, imitating the wooden roof of the «Hazarashen» - type peasant home. In exterior decoration the main emphasis is laid on the western side. The entrance to the building is framed in two rows of trefoils and an inscription, the semi-circular tympanum of the door is filled with an ornament and with a representation of the Holy Virgin seated on a rug with the Child and flanked by two saints. The pointed tympanum of the twin window over the door is decorated with a unique relief representation of the large-headed Father blessing the Crucifix with his right hand and holding in his left hand the head of Adam, with a dove - the Holy Spirit - above it. In the right corner of the tympanum there is a seraph dove; the space between it and the figure of the Father is filled with an inscription balancing the composition of the scene of crucifixion. The relief is centered on the face of the Father. The figures are executed in high relief, and the inscriptions are depressed into the surface of the tympanum. The reliefs of both tympanums are distinguished by monumentality and completeness.

St.Astvatatzin church, known as Burtelashen («Burtel-built») after the name of its founder, is situated to the south-east of St.Karapet church. Completed in 1339, it was Momik's last work. Near the church there is his tomb khachkar, small and modestly decorated, dated the same year.

Burtelashen temple is the architectural dominant of Noravank ensemble. Accordingly, decoration is more modest at the bottom and richer at the top.

The western portal is decorated with special splendor. The doors are framed in broad rectangular platbands, with ledges in the upper part, with columns, fillets and strips of various, mostly geometrical, fine and intricate patterns. Between the outer platband and the arched framing of the openings there are representations of doves and sirens with women's crowned heads. The door tympanums are decorated with high reliefs showing, in the ground storey, the Holy Virgin with the Child and Archangels Gabriel and Michael at her sides and, in the upper storey, a half-length representation of Christ and figures of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

## Sanahin and Haghpat monasteries

### Lori



Sanahin



Haghpat

These two Byzantine monasteries in the Tumanian region from the period of prosperity during the Kiurikian dynasty (10th-13th centuries) were important centres of learning. Sanahin in particular was renowned for its school of illuminators and calligraphers. They are exceptional examples of the 'domed hall' ecclesiastical architecture that developed in Armenia from the 10th to the 13th centuries, which blended elements of both Byzantine church architecture and the traditional vernacular building style of this region. Construction of the main church of the large fortified monastic complex of Haghpat, dedicated to the Holy Cross, began in 966-67 and was completed in 991. The central dome rests on the four massive pillars in the side walls. The external walls are almost entirely covered by triangular niches. The apse contains a fresco

of Christ Pantocrator. The building is complete and in its original form, apart from some 11th- and 12th-century restorations, including the large gavit through which access is gained to the church. The plan of the gavit, built in the second decade of the 13th century, differs markedly in style from the main church. A large narthex-type building used for meetings, teaching and funerary rituals is based on vernacular architecture in wood, with the roof supported on four pillars in the centre of the structure. Vaulting divides the interior of the roof into nine sections, the central one of which (*yerdik*) is the highest and dominates the interior space, as well as illuminating it. The church is joined by a vaulted passage to a large chapter house, in the same style as the gavit, built in the 13th century. Also connected to the church is the library, a compact square building dating back to the 12th century. The Sanahin Monastery consists of a large group of buildings on the plateau above the Debet gorge and skilfully integrated into the impressive mountain landscape. The buildings are laid out on two rectangular axes, with their facades facing west. The main church, built in the 10th century, is the Cathedral of the Redeemer. The emphasis of the cross-shaped interior is on the central nucleus and the harmony between the square base and the circular dome. The central dome in this case is surrounded by four two-storey sacristies or chapels. To the west there is a four-columned gavit built in 1181. Its plan is that of a cross inscribed in a square. Lighting is

by means of an aperture in the centre of the dome. This is the earliest known example of this type of structure, which owes its origins to Armenian peasant dwellings consisting of square rooms with four free-standing pillars supporting the roof and a central hole to allow smoke to be dispersed. The Church of the Mother of God (Astvatatzin), located to the north of the cathedral and connected with it by means of a open-ended vaulted passage, is the oldest building in the complex, built in 934 by monks fleeing from Byzantium. The large library (scriptorium), built in 1063, is square in plan and vaulted, with ten niches of varying sizes in which codices and books were stored. At the south-eastern corner of the library is to be found the small church dedicated to St Gregory the Illuminator. The 11th-century Academy of Gregory Magistros is located between the two main churches. The deep niches along the walls and the abundance of light give this building an exceptional spatial quality. The cemetery, located to the south-east of the main buildings, contains the late 12th-century mausoleum of the Zakarian princes.

### Khachkars (cross-stones)



A khachkar is an outdoor, vertically erected flat stele, which, when in situ, is positioned in relation to the four cardinal points of the world; the western side has an ornamentally carved cross, accompanied by vegetative-geometric motifs, with animals (particularly birds), and sometimes with carvings of people<sup>1</sup>.

The khachkar both stimulated and reflects the unique development of Armenian culture; it is one of the most characteristic symbols of Armenian identity. With its marvelous carvings, savior symbolism of the cross, and the notion of eternity, which is conveyed by the stele, the khachkar was one of the most respected and, due to its positioning under the open air, one of the most accessible saints. After more than a thousand years, the khachkar is also a

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.khachkar.am/en/khachkar\\_function/index.php](http://www.khachkar.am/en/khachkar_function/index.php)

contemporary cultural phenomenon; today hundreds of khachkars are still being created in Armenia.

Armenia has a lot of hand-made crosses, sculptured of rocks, none is identical to another one. Each cross-stone has its own pattern; each one has its own story. Sculpturing cross-stones, which sometimes weigh a few tons, requires hard work, genuine talent, and plenty of time. A typical cross stone is made out of slate of volcanic basalt or tuff.

It can be stated that the main stimuli of khachkar erection was an anticipation or a goal. Without this goal, which can be described as a holy attribute directed towards the future, the khachkar would become a mere historical chronicle that would lack any possibility of involvement in lifes routines. The goals of khachkar erection are very limited, and revolve around the main holy practices of the cross: help, protection, victory, long life, remembrance, mediation toward salvation of the soul. It is this purposefulness of holy practices that fully materializes the khachkar as an entity that is practically directed towards future and that contrasts the meditative and rescuing powers of the cross, the memorial essence of the script and image, the ritualistic practice of an altar as a place for prayer, the tradition of stone-stele as a symbol of perpetuity-eternity. The classic khachkar was an individualistic monument. This is one of the main differences between khachkars and other religious-spiritual structures, and this

allowed for its mass distribution. At the same time, by virtue of its open air placement and by the invitation to worship the cross, each khachkar was open to any believer. It can be stated that one of the primary features of the khachkar is precisely the assurance of a direct (unmediated) connection of believers with the holy power and its symbol. Study shows that the holy feature of the cross was initially directed towards future, sometimes the near future but mainly the distant future. The cross appeared as a custodian and transmitter, a mediator of remembrance to God, leading and showing the way toward the Second Advent. Thus, the core feature of the cross as mediator between people and God is obvious.

### Amberd Fortress

### Aragatsotn



Amberd was a midcentury fort-city. It was built during the 10th century, 7 km. to the north of Byurakan village, of the historical Aragatzotn district (on the southern wing of the Aragatz mountain). It was situated in the triangular cape where the rivers Arkashen and Amberd were joined.

Amberd means «a fortress in the clouds» in Armenian - a fitting name given its elevation at 2,300m on the slopes of the Mount Aragats.

The mansion and some parts of the fortress's wall were constructed in the 7th century. In the 10th century it was the military defense center of the Bagratuni and Pahlavuni kingdoms. In the 11th century it was invaded by the Selghuks and became their military center.

In 1196 the united Armenian-Georgian army, under the leadership of Zakare, freed Amberd from the Selghuks. And once again in 1236 the Mongols invaded the fort and nearly ruined it. At the end of the 13th century the Vachutyan's once again reconstructed the fort.

The ruins of the Amberd's fortress including the walls, the church, the bathroom and other sections were preserved. The fortress had an irregular triangular shape. The most accessible section from the outside of the three-storey mansion was located at the north-western section of the fort-city, and it stretched for approximately 1500 km. On the southern side of the mansion, which faced the center of the fort window, openings of the upper storeys were preserved. For defense reasons,

the lower story did not have windows, instead it had a small entrance hidden by a sliding stone door.

The mansion's storeys were separated from each other by wooden boards attached to timbers. Each storey had a table-type room. Amberd's church was built in 1026 by Vahram Pahlavuni. It is the first church constructed with double entries from all four corners of the cross-wings. In order to lighten the weight of the roof, several large clay jars were used to support it. The church has a few inscriptions (one is inside) on the northern wall.

To the south of the mansion preserved in good condition, was a bathroom (10-11th centuries) and a stone construction with a small cloakroom. The water was transported to the bathroom through clay hoses, and the hot water for the pool through iron pipes. The steam from the furnace passed beneath the floor, heating it and the walls. Amberd's water came from a distance of 4-5 km. through the clay pipes. In the mansion and in the central fort, pools of water were collected. During excavation, weapons, decorations, coins and other such items of metal were discovered.

As we see, the complex of Amberd derives its great historical importance from its uniqueness, being one of the best and the largest examples of Armenian fortress construction. It is a vivid example of Armenian medieval architecture and one of the rare feudal castles that have survived in Armenia.

Erebuni, Metsamor, Gyumri, Smbataberd

fortresses (etc.) are also well-known in Armenia. Each of them has its own attractiveness and uniqueness.

### National epic: Daredevils of Sassoun



Armenians are one of those few nations who has national epic. A national epic is an epic poem or a literary work of epic scope which seeks or is believed to capture and express the essence or spirit of a particular nation; not necessarily a nation-state, but at least an ethnic or linguistic group with aspirations to independence or autonomy.

National epics frequently recount the origin of a nation, a part of its history, or a crucial

event in the development of national identity such as other national symbols. **Daredevils of Sassoun** is the title of an Old Armenian heroic epic in four cycles (parts) and is about four generations of Sassoun's warriors. It is commonly cited as one of the most important works of Armenian folklore. This recital of the legendary deeds of four generations of strongmen in a warrior community in the Armenian highlands is in the tradition of heroic folktales that dramatize the story of a whole nation and voice its deepest sentiments and aspirations. It has survived solely by word of mouth, transmitted from one generation to another by village bards. The literary merits of the Sassoun saga surpass its value as a historical or linguistic document. Մասնա (Sasna) in Armenian refers to Sassoun - a region and a city located in Western Armenia, in the rugged mountain country southwest of Lake Van. Ծուր (Tsour) means crazy, mad, strongman, daredevil.

The most accurate and complete title of this epic is Daredevils of Sassoun. It has however been published under various titles:

- David of Sassoun
- Sanasar and Baghtazar
- David of Sassoun or Meher's door

and many others. All these titles correspond with four cycles of the epic.

The story of Sassoun - the greatest achievement of the oral literature - was "discovered" in 1873 by a bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Garegin

Servantstian, who had exceptionally close contacts with the peasantry in the more remote inaccessible parts of Western Armenia, where he could write the whole story down in peasants' own words.

The tale was published in Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1874 under the title *David of Sassoun or Meherr's Door*. The bishop wrote in the introduction:

The life of David and his exploits belong in the Middle Ages... The entire story is a record of courage, of domestic virtue, of piety, and of simple, open-hearted relations with his beloved woman as well as with his enemies. Despite its irregularities and anachronisms it has some fine stylistic qualities and narrative devices in it... The publication of this tale would be of interest to the understanding reader, but I suppose there will also be those who will express their contempt for it and abuse both the story and my own person. These readers will not understand it. But it does not matter. I shall consider myself encouraged if I find twenty sympathetic readers".

#### Duduk: Armenian musical instrument



It has been said that music soothes the soul. Have you ever felt the miraculous influence of music? If not, you need to hear the touching sounds of the Armenian Duduk. The Duduk is among the oldest Armenian instruments. It is also the most beloved, because it can fully express the emotions of the Armenian people. The instrument has a 1,900 year history and although it is used in many Caucasus countries it is of true Armenian origin.

The duduk is a cylindrical instrument made of apricot wood and is typically 28, 33, or 40 cm in length. It has 8 or 9 holes and 1 thumbhole which provide a range of one octave. The double reed, also known as *ramish* or *yegheg* in Armenian, is typically 9-14 cm. in length and is surrounded by a thin flexible wood binding that slides along the length of the reed. This binding is used for tuning the duduk as it controls the opening/closing of the reed. The reed itself grows plentifully along the Arax River in Armenia.

As we already mentioned, the Duduk is a wind instrument made from apricot timber, and thus it is called *tsiranapogh* (apricot pipe) in the Armenian language. It has a warm, soft and slightly dulled sound that is controlled by pressure of the lips and by closing eight or nine holes with fingers. As a rule, the Duduk is played in a duet. The first Duduk plays the main melody; while the second, as people put it, "*Dam e pahum*" (holds the dam). The dam spices the main melody and provides corresponding background. The Duduk can also be

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successfully accompanied by Dhol (a two sided drum).

Armenia is a country of numerous talented musicians who play the Duduk. Currently the most famous and beloved duduk player is, the world renowned, Master-of-Duduk, Jivan Gasparyan, and the world owes a special thanks to him for presenting the Duduk to the world. Today the Duduk has been used in almost 60 famous Hollywood and independent films.

The magic sound of the Duduk is in such harmony with nature, history, and the spirit of Armenia, that it is hard to picture this country without the Duduk. The dynamics of the sound are controlled by adjusting the pressure of the lips on the reed and by covering the finger holes. Although the duduk is tuned to be "untempered and diatonic" chromatic notes can be obtained by partially covering the finger holes.

In 2005, UNESCO proclaimed the Armenian duduk music as a "Masterpiece of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity."

## The feast of Musaler



On the way to Echmiadzin, on the right you can easily notice an orange severe eagle-like building. It is Musaler memorial and museum. Musaler is an Armenian village situated in the marz of Armavir. This small village is a symbol of Armenian will to survive, a firmness of national spirit. Musaler was situated on the Mediterranean coast, on the territory of historical Armenia, in today's Turkey by the Syrian border. The event that has come to symbolize the people of Musaler with its unique Armenian culture, history and language unfolded during the bloody year of 1915 when Turkish plan of ethnic cleansing of Armenians was started. Armenians have been announced to leave their homeland, but Musaler population ignored deportation edict issued by Young Turk regime and chose to resist against Turkish troops and decided to climb the mountain and organize self-defense. The 4300 inhabitants of Musa Ler for 53 days repelled onslaughts by Turkish armies. They were starving without food and water, they were out in the rain for days and in order to warm themselves and not to lose the

presence of mind and courage they were dancing to the music of zurna and drum. And Musaler resisted and the death was weak against the immortal heroes of Musaler. They noticed warships in the sea and French sailors sighted a banner the Armenians had tied to a tree on the mountain emblazoned with the words: "Christians in Distress: Rescue." □ French and British naval ships evacuated 4,200 people from Musa Ler to Port Said in Egypt. The Armenians were allowed to return after World War First to their homeland in the newly formed Syria, but in 1939 Musa Dagh Armenians abandoned their villages for second and final time, when Turkey annexed the region. Many of them were resettled in Lebanon, in the village Aynchar, and many others settled in Armenia, in the village of Musa Ler. This historical event later inspired Franz Werfel to write his novel "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh". This book became an instant bestseller for all times. In Europe many Jews read it as a warning about their fate. During the Holocaust years, copies of the novel have been circulated from hand to hand among the ghetto's defenders as a source of inspiration and a call to arms against Nazis. The people of Musa Ler, wherever they are in the world, always remember their history, culture and language. Every year on the anniversary of the heroic stance on the mountain, descendants of the Musa Ler pay tribute to the fallen and celebrate the victory every year on the third Sunday of September. Only once a year one can see forty cauldrons boiling Harisa, a traditional

food of Musadaghians. People are up all night until sunrise, preparing this delicious meal made from wheat and red meat under beating of drums. Harissa has an historical past. It was served both on festive and funeral occasions and for this very reason it is cooked from the meat of a lamb sacrificed with a priest's blessing. Only to 14 natives of Musaler are honored to cook harisa and it is handed down from father to son. During the preparation of national meal all night long Musalerians are gathering around the fire, beat the drums, and sing traditional songs and dance. Even the elderly residents of village for a moment forget their diseases, throw away their walking sticks, straighten their backs and began to dance.

### Armenian ancient manuscripts



One of the most precious treasures of the Armenian nation is the collection of ancient manuscripts. There are around 30,000 ancient Armenian manuscripts in the world and the majority of them (about 17,000

manuscripts) are preserved in Yerevan. They can be found in Matenadaran, the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, named after Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian Alphabet. Other major collections of Armenian manuscripts are preserved in library of Armenian Patriarchy in Jerusalem (about 4000 manuscripts) the Mkhitarian Brotherhood in Venice (about 4000 manuscripts), and in Vienna (about 2500 manuscripts).

The art of making Armenian manuscripts has ancient traditions; the manuscripts are unique and are of great esthetic value. The history of Armenian manuscripts goes back to the time when the Armenian alphabet was created by Mesrop Mashtots, in 405. The first book to be written via Armenian letters was the Bible, which was followed by distinctive literature. Up to the XIV century, Armenian books were handwritten. The first printed Armenian books were made in 1512. Handwritten manuscripts were completely replaced by printed books in the XIX century.

Armenian manuscripts are shaped like books and have been called "matyan" or "girk". There have been no rolled Armenian manuscripts discovered. Up to the tenth century, manuscripts were written on sheets of parchment, later, starting from the tenth century, paper was used. The parchment was made mainly from the leather of domestic animals (lamb, calf), while paper was imported. The process of making books had a few stages: preparation of the parchment and the ink, letters (calligraphy

and spelling), illuminations, stitching and interlacing. It required involvement of a large group of specialists and a few workshops. Hard cover bindings protected the books from damage and served as an external design. During its long history the Armenian people created thousands of manuscripts regarding history, art, science, religion and mundane topics. These manuscripts have always been considered to be sacred. They were protected and saved from aggressors, they were bought back as prisoners of war, and in many inscriptions the manuscripts are talked about as if it's a living creature. There are many stories about common people who have risked their lives to save these nationally valued manuscripts that have become crystallized in time and space. These heroes would save historical manuscripts instead of attempting to save their own property that they had earned throughout decades.

The story of the largest Armenian manuscript "Msho Charantir" ("Homilies of Mush"), which is currently exhibited in Matenadaran, is a animated example of this. The manuscript was written in Avag Monastery in Yrznka city. Three years of hard work (from 1200 to 1202) was necessary to complete the manuscript. It was written on a parchment with 604 sheets and 1208 pages.

Ancient manuscripts vividly prove the existence of highly developed culture, spiritual values, and the excellence of Armenians in various sciences. The world of ancient manuscripts is a world of endless

secrets, and puzzles, which are yet to be solved.

## Lake Sevan

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### Gegharqunik



Sevan is one of the three large lakes in the Armenian highland. In ancient times it was called Gegharkunik or Geghama Sea. Sevan is the largest lake in Caucasus as well as one on the largest and highest freshwater lakes of the world. The lake surface is at an altitude of 1897m above sea level. Its depth is 80m, an area-1260km, length-70km, width-55km and the volume is 58billion cubic metres. In summer, the middle temperature of lake surface is 18-23 degrees above zero. In winter the lake is partly covered with ice. Sevan consists of two unequal parts - Big Sevan and Small Sevan. These parts are merged by 5th km length strait which is located between the peninsulas of Artanish and Noradus. The southern and eastern shores are broad and smooth, while the northern and north-eastern shores are narrow and rocky. The Lake, on the west side, is surrounded by Geghama from the north - Aregunyats from the east - Sevan and from the South - Vardenis mountains. Sevan is fed by 28 rivers of which Gavaraget,

Argithci, Martuni, Karthcaghbyur, Masrik, Dzknaget are the most famous. The Lake Sevan has tectonic, volcanic origin. From the geological point of view the Great Sevan is an ancient, intermountain concavity, where there was a water basin in the remote past. A separate lake has been existed as well in the place of the Small Sevan. Young volcanic lava-stream raised the water level blocking the exit of the Small Sevan. Then Big and Small Sevan assembled into the current Sevan. In the northern part of the lake the island of Sevan is situated which has become a peninsula by artificially making water level low. The lake has a good impact on the surrounding area and preserves the natural equilibrium of the entire basin. The water as well as the fish reserves are of great economic importance. Most of the canals irrigating the Ararat valley as well as the whole 6 electric power stations of cascade of Hrazdan are supplied by the water of Sevan. In the middle of 20th century people by their interference had violated the natural condition of lake. Sevan-Hrazdan irrigable and power complex was built. Due to the deepening of the source of the river Hrazdan, the part of water supplies had been released. The water level dropped up to 19m and the area decreased up to 12%. An opportunity appears in the place of liberated areas to build a railway and highway passing through the north-eastern coast. New changes were made in water balance to make it possible for the construction of water-piping Arpa-Sevan tunnel, with length of 48,3km. Sevan National park was created for solving

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environmental problems. Sevan is of great importance from the view of tourism. Around the coast there are many ‘cyclopean’ fortresses relating to the Bronze Age (Lcashaen, Hayraavanq). Archaeological research has shown that 3500 years ago the substantial part of Sevan was occupied by land. There were populated areas where the population was engaged in farming and cattle-breeding. A lot of buildings of Urartu Kingdom (Velikukhi, rock inscription of Rusa) and medieval architectural monuments (Sevanavanq, Hayraavanq and etc.) were preserved. In the history of Armenian people many significant events are associated with the Lake Sevan. In the historical novel "Gevorg Marzpetuni" by Muratsan, in chapter "Tzovamart" the battle of Sevan against the Arab invasion was described. In autumn the huge clouds descending from the peaks of high mountains into the water surface make a striking sight.

### Zorats Qarer (Qarahunj)

#### Syunik



One of the most ancient megalithic constructions of the world is Zorats Karer (Syunik district) not reaching up to Sisian. From the line on a burnt plain row of huge red-brown monoliths are visible. The two-meter pointed blocks last precisely from the south to the north, fencing large territory, in the center they form a correct circle.

The total area of the observatory in Armenia is 7 hectares. According to the scientist's findings, a temple consisting of 40 stones built in honor of the Armenians' main God, Ari, meaning the Sun, is situated in the central part of Carahunje (Karahunj or Zorats Karer). Besides the temple, it had a large and developed observatory, and also a university that makes up the temple's wings. Around 200km from Yerevan, the capital city of the Republic of Armenia, not far from the town of Sisian (Syunik region of Republic of Armenia), there is a prehistoric monument consisting of hundreds of Standing Stones on a territorial area of approximately 7 hectares. Many of these stones have smooth angled holes of 4 to 5cm in diameter, the angles of the holes being directed at different points on the horizon and outer space.

Professor Paris Herouni, a member of the Armenian National Academy of Science and President of the Radiophysics Research Institute in Yerevan, has undertaken a series of scientific expeditions, starting from 1994 (four days each occasion), the timing of these expeditions being at equinox and solstice days. The objective of this research

was to investigate and try to solve the mysteries of this Monument.

Research to date has established that the name of the Monument was carahunge (“Speaking Stones”). The age of Carahunge has been estimated to be 7500 years or older (VI millennium BC). This was accurately ascertained by taking readings of the motion of the Sun, Moon and stars, using four independent astronomical methods based on the laws of the changes of the Earth’s axis precession and incline. The period when Carahunge’s activities took place was also calculated, this being a period of more than 5500 years. It was also demonstrated that the main functions of Karahunge were:

1. to serve as the temple of AR (Sun) - The Father and Main God of the Armenians;
2. to provide protection through TIR, the old Armenian God of science;
3. to play the role of a large and sophisticated Observatory (the North and South stone Arms); and
4. to serve as a University.

Some scientists suppose that Qarahunj is similar to constructions in many areas of Europe. The most known of them is the Stonehenge (II mil. B.C.).

## Khosrov forest (Khosrov reserve)

### Ararat



As far back as the 4-th century, approximately 1700 years ago, the Armenian king Khosrov II Kotack declared the southern slopes of the Gueghama mountains a restricted area. He "planted a forest" and made it a hunting-ground for the palace.

Over the centuries the Khosrov Reserve has been mentioned in the history of Armenia as a hunting-ground for the nobility and animals were brought and bred in the Reserve from various regions, especially Persia. In 1958 the Khosrov forest, consisting of 8 separate lots, was officially declared a reserve and its borders were widened to create a single parcel of land (in 1992). The Khosrov Forest Reserve is situated south-east of Yerevan, at the foot of the Gueghama volcanic mountain, in the basins of the Azat and Vedi rivers. The Reserve is situated 1400-2250 meters above sea-level, and extends over an area of 29196 hectares, 9000 of which is

covered with forests. Khosrov Reserve has very complicated relief with amazing landscapes. As everywhere in Armenia the results of tectonic activities - fractures, steeps, etc. - can be seen. Atmogenic processes, hot climate and water create numerous fantastic monuments - figures, pyramids, towers, quaint cliffs etc. The reserve has rich flora. Within its borders grow more than 1800 kinds of plants (more than half of species growing in Armenia), 156 of which are considered rare, endangered and disappearing. Numerous rare and disappearing species are mentioned in the Red Book and grow only here. It is the only Caucasian Reserve of mountain xerophytes, where semi-deserts, various phryganoid formations, different types of arid thin forests, tragacanthys steppes and others. Fauna of the reserve is also rich. Invertebrate animals and in particular insects are presented by unique diversity of specific composition. There are amphibians, 7 types of fish, and over 30 reptiles living there such as the Levantine viper, the Montpellier snake, the dotted dwarf and the collared dwarf snakes, the Pleskes racerunner, the five-streaked and the three-lined lizards, the golden grass and the Snaider's skinks, the eastern spadefoot and others.

In mountain slops a semi-desert landscape dominates. Forest cover spreads on average heights consisting of sparse forests of oak-trees. Here grows broad-leaf euonymus, mountain ash and the Caucasian

honeysuckle. At higher expanse mountain prairie vegetation grows.

Armenian mouflon (wild sheep) and Bezoar goat are widespread in fauna. You can see also leopard, grizzly bear, wild boar, fox, rabbit, hare lynx, marten, wolf, badgers and etc....Forest is particularly rich in bird world. You can see black kite, eagle-lammergeyer, Griffon vulture, eagle, wild pigeon, seagull and etc...There are many reptiles; particularly a poisonous viper. Since 1594 the Ussurian spotted deer has been acclimatized.

Geghard, Havuts Tar, Kakavaberd, medieval bridge and many other historical monuments are located in Khosrov forest. A deep river Azat flows through it, on the tributaries of which there are many magnificent waterfalls.

The importance of the Khosrov Forest extends beyond the local margins and plays a significant role in the entire ecology of the region.

### Yerevan city



Yerevan is the capital and largest city of Armenia and one of the world's oldest continuously-inhabited cities. Situated along the Hrazdan River, Yerevan is the administrative, cultural, and industrial center of the country. It has been the capital since 1918, the thirteenth in the history of Armenia.

The history of Yerevan dates back to the 8th century BC, with the founding of the fortress of Erebuni in 782 BC by king Argishti I at the western extreme of the Ararat plain.

Yerevan possess great cultural heritage. There are many sightseeings, museums, churches, historic and cultural monuments, cinemas, theatres, galleries, exhibitions, circus, cafeterias, bars and restaurants, fountains, large and small parks in the city.

The city is home to many cinema halls; among them the famous Moskva cinema. Since 2004, every year Moskva hosts the Golden Apricot international film festival. Many other cinema halls characterized with important architectural values are operating in the city such as Hayrenik, Nayiri, Rossiya, etc.

The Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theatre consists of two concert halls: Aram Khatchaturian concert hall and the hall of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet named after Alexander Spendiarian.

Numerous theatres and halls allow the audience to enjoy a multitude of various shows and performances, such as the modern Complex named after Karen Demirchyan. Other significant theatres include: Yerevan State Musical Comedy

Theatre named after Hagop Baronian, Russian Drama Theatre named after Constantin Stanislavski, Yerevan State Dramatic Theatre named after Hrachia Ghaplanian, Yerevan State Hamazgain Theatre and the State Puppet Theatre named after Hovhannes Tumanyan. The Sundukyan State Academic Theatre of Yerevan is the oldest modern theatre in Armenia.

The Armenian Genocide Memorial (Genocide Museum & Tsitsernakaberd Monument): This structure is located on a high altitude above the city center. The monument is very auspicious and is dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide. The monument has a huge collection of paintings and sculptures which reflect the lifestyle of olden days. The famous monument of Tsitsernakaberd meaning "Fortress of swallows" also lies within its premises and is worth watching.

Victory Park: This is basically an amusement park and is one of the main attractions of Sightseeing in Yerevan. The park is famous for the monument of Mother Armenia. It also houses a store which displays Soviet military equipment which was used during wars. The Park also presents a superb view of the city center.

Katoghike: This is another popular tourist attraction of the city. It is the smallest and the oldest church of the city which is constructed in typical Armenian style.

Erebuni Fortress: This fortress houses a lot of ancient jewelry and arms and ammunitions which were used during wars. It



also houses a lot of paintings which reflect the lifestyle of the natives.

**Matenadaran:** This is a huge museum which is also a research institution. It is dedicated to the Armenian language. The museum has huge collection of different varieties of books and scrolls on Armenian literature.

**The National Art Gallery:** This gallery is situated at the Republic square and lies adjacent to the Historical museum. The gallery has several floors housing different types of paintings which are organized according to their country and origin.

**Republic Square:** It is located at the heart of the city. The construction of the square began in the year 1926. Many architects have given their valuable ideas in building this square. The first general plan for rebuilding Yerevan was laid in the year 1924 by Alexander Tamanyan.

### Khndzoresk cave village

#### Syunik



8 km East from Goris, on an altitude of 1580 m above sea level, amongst the rocks, caves and gently inviting nature is found one of the most interesting sights in Armenia: Old Khndzoresk. This is a unique habitat, where every visitor feels as if the time has stopped. People have lived in this area, cut from the civilized world throughout centuries. They have lived amongst rocks; have protected themselves from enemies, from cold and from heat, from rains and animals by the nature itself. Strangely enough people have lived in these caves up to 1958, when Armenia was far an industrially developed country. The instinct of continuation of their family line was established so deeply in people of this city during millenniums, that they ignored all achievements of science and continued to live in caves. Old Khndzoresk was the largest village in Eastern Armenia. In 1913 there were 1800 houses, 7 functional schools out of which 2 were parochial and 5 were private.

Old Khndzoresk expended on both slopes of the mountain. These slopes had no flat areas necessary for construction of houses. And because of this, people used natural and man made caves on these slope as dwellings. Many of these dwellings were 20-30 m high from the ground, arranged one over the other so that the ceiling for one house was the floor for the other. These cave dwellings are many centuries old and the cave city itself seems to be more than 1000 years old. There were 4 churches in Old Khndzoresk:

St. Hripsime, St. Tadeos, Church of Anapat (Desert) and Old Church. In lover Khndzoresk, in the old graveyard, under a basalt plate with annotations, is buried Mkhitar Sparapet, (Mkhitar the troops leader), the hero of Armenian nation from the first quarter of XVIII century, who fought against Persian and Turkish invaders. Old Khndzoresk is a historical monument and is under government's protection. New Khndzoresk emerged during the 50s of 20th century. There are approximately 2000 inhabitants in New Khndzoresk. The main field of occupation for these people is agriculture, especially stock rising.

So, Khndzoresk is widely famous for its canyon with picturesque rock formations and ancient cave settlement. The artificial caves, some of which are currently used as stables and warehouses, used to be inhabited till the 1950s. In the bottom of the gorge there is St.Hripsime church, dated back to 17th century. On a spur beyond on the right side of the gorge, as we already mentioned above, there is Anapat (hermitage) with the tomb of Mkhitar Sparapet. The cave church of St.Tatevos can also be found nearby.

## Annual wine festival in Areni



The Vayots Dzor region is known for its grapes and wines. Throughout most of the year, those travelling through the region on their way to points further on, will see local residents selling their wines and other vegetables along the road.

In January 2011 archaeologists announced the discovery of the earliest known winery, the Areni-1 winery, seven months after the world's oldest leather shoe, the Areni-1 winery, was discovered in the same cave. The winery, which is over six-thousand years old, contains a wine press, fermentation vats, jars, and cups. Archaeologists also found grape seeds and vines of the species *Vitis vinifera*.

The Areni village was an old and famous village in Vayots Dzor district. The historical location of the village was to the west of present day Areni, on top of the hill (the ruins were preserved). In the 13th century

the Syunik's ruler Orbelyan Tarsaitch moved his palace from Yeghegis to Areni.

On the eastern edge of the Areni village, is the St.Astvatatzin (Holy Virgin) church. According to the inscriptions it was built by architect and painter Momik in 1321. In the center of the western entrance of the church there is a barelief of St.Mary embracing The Holy Child. The Holy Mother is portrayed realistically in contemporary attire.

Close to the church are the ruins of the Tarsaitch ruler's palace. 1km to the north-eastern section of Areni are the ruins of the bridge (13thc.), which was built by bishop Sargis in 1265-1287. In the same location the ruins of the older bridge can be seen.

The village has been known since the 3rd century A.D. Over two dozens of grape sorts have been developed here. Areni wine is famous not only in Armenia. The community has 150 vineyards and produces 300 tons of wine every year.

Established in 2004, the Areni Wine Festival is not only a showcase for great wine, the festival is a major event for traditional food making and tasting. In addition to pure wine, there are also Armenian national meals and several ways of preparing wine presented at the festival.

Participants taste wine and cheese, squeeze grapes, prepare lavash, gata and the traditional rshta, view an exhibition of paintings, prepare canisters and participate in several contests. The festival features Armenian song and dance, as well as folk and national games.

Villagers sell home-made products - cream, honey, nuts and walnuts, vegetables, fruits, dried fruits, baked goods, lavash, home-made jams and jellies, sweet sujukh, herbal teas and all the other products that a typical Armenian household usually prepares for its members.

A lot of tourists from different nationalities and from different parts of the world come to Areni to take part in annual wine festival. Besides the festival there are also other sightseeing in Areni which are valuable to see.

### Vardavar festival



Although now a Christian tradition, Vardavar's history dates back to pagan times. The ancient festival is traditionally associated with the goddess Astghik, who was the goddess of water, beauty, love and fertility. The festivities associated with this religious observance of Astghik were named "Vartavar" because Armenians offered her roses as a celebration ("vart" means "rose" in and "var" mean "rise"), this is why it was

celebrated in the harvest time. As for an ancient legend pagan Goddess Astghik had spread love on Armenian earth by pouring water from roses. Vardavar (Transfiguration, Brilliance) is one of the most favorite, joyful and noteworthy holidays in Armenia. After adopting Christianity this holiday had some changes and now days it is celebrated as a holiday devoted to the well-known event of the Christ's transfiguration, when he appeared to his disciples on the Mount Tabor in his brightened appearance. According to some specialists, Vardavar holiday is also related to the Flood and the Noah's descent from the Ark.

Vardavar was celebrated by starting pilgrimages to the sanctuaries and saint waters situated on the well-known mountains.

During the holiday's celebration the people were gathering the wheat-ears in the fields and took them to the church for blessing to keep the fields away from the hail and damages. Girls were collecting multi-colored bouquets of flowers (especially bunches of a yellow flower called "vartiver") and have been furtively throwing them to the gardens and yards of their relatives and neighbors. They were also knitting bunches from the wheatears, so called khachburs.

Vardavar is a very festive and brilliant holiday: young people lighted fires and met the dawn dancing shurjpar (round dance) around them. The dances were accompanied

with songs, plays and jokes. In the morning girls visited all the houses and were given presents for the bunches of flowers thrown to their yards.

In the mountainous places, fairs, picnics, joyful performances and plays of tightrope walkers were organized.

The most remarkable and important tradition of Vardavar holiday was the ceremony of making the pigeons fly. The pigeons grown up during the whole year especially for Vardavar holiday were flying in the sky admiring the audience and especially their proud keeper-trainers.

Another very marvelous and interesting ceremony of Vardavar, as we already mentioned, is the tradition of pouring water on each other, which is preserved till our times. From morning till night all the people both young and old, men and women, children and adults, friends and strangers, collect water in their pails and other pans and spill water on each other. Nobody is offended by. On that day, the people are merry, friendly and kind. For the children and teenagers this is the most expected and favorite holidays in the year.

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